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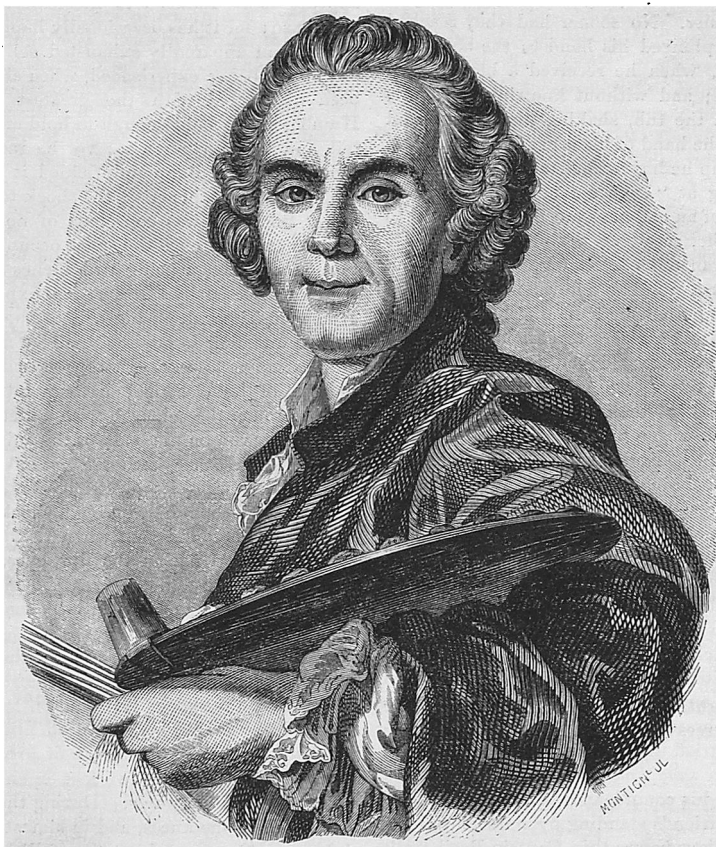
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WORKS OF THE GREAT MASTERS.

JOSEPH VERNET.



CLAUDE JOSEPH VERNET, father of Carle Vernet, and grandfather of Horace, was himself the son of a painter, and was endowed with a greater share than any one else of that genius



for painting which has rendered his family illustrious as artists through four generations.

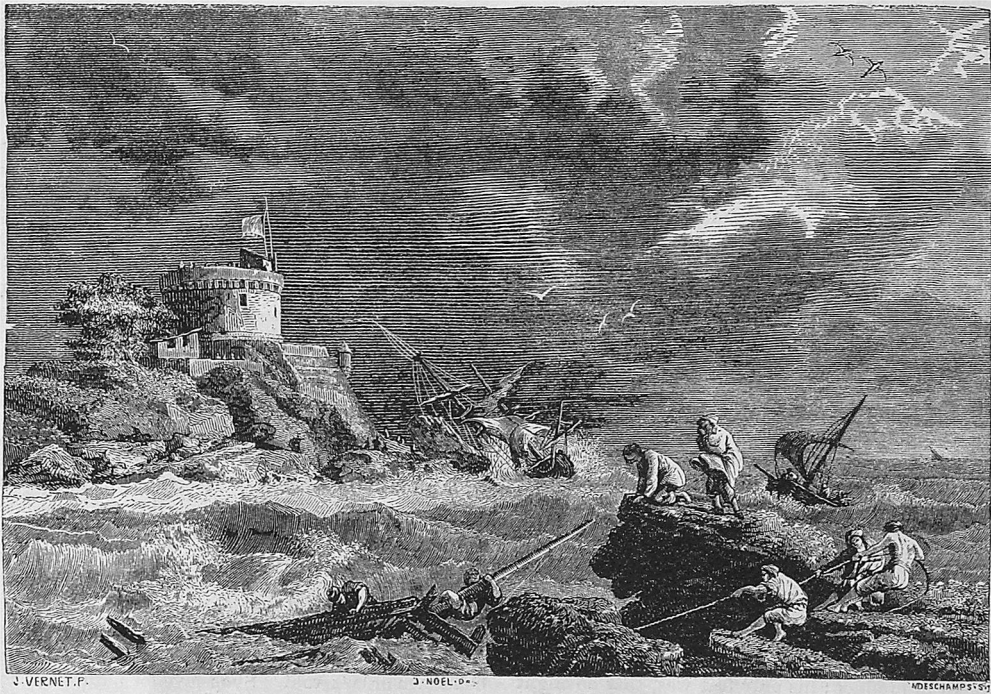
The wonderful stories told about most celebrated painters are really true with respect to Joseph Vernet. He has himself often related that, on his return from Italy, his mother gave him some drawings executed by him at the age of five, when he was rewarded by being allowed to use the pencils he had tried to purloin. Before he was fifteen years old, he already painted frieze-panels, fire-screens, sedan-chair panels, &c., and gave proof of that facility in conceiving and executing which was one of the characteristic marks of his genius.

It was not possible for Joseph Vernet, whose father dreamed of nothing but of seeing him pursue the glorious career of the historical painter, to remain for ever at Avignon, his native place. It was, therefore, thought necessary to send him to Rome; consequently, his father put, one morning, a few louis d'or into his hand, and sent him off with a waggoner, who undertook to take him to Marseilles. The journey took a long while to perform; for it was necessary to stop the horses every instant, so that the young painter might have time enough to sketch the landscapes of Provence, which are so different from those of Le Comtat, or to admire a range of mountains, the sterility of which formed a strong contrast with the verdure of the plains which stretched beneath, with the innumerable roads that covered them. But while Joseph Vernet was thus going to consult the great masters, he suddenly met with his real master—the sea.

When he saw it for the first time, from the top of a mountain called La Viste, near Marseilles, it made so deep an impression upon him, that henceforth his vocation was decided on; he immediately felt that he was destined to be a painter of marine subjects. Before him stretched the Mediterranean as far as the eye could reach, while three islands, which lay at

a few leagues from the shore, seemed to be placed there in order to break the uniformity of the immense lake, and to

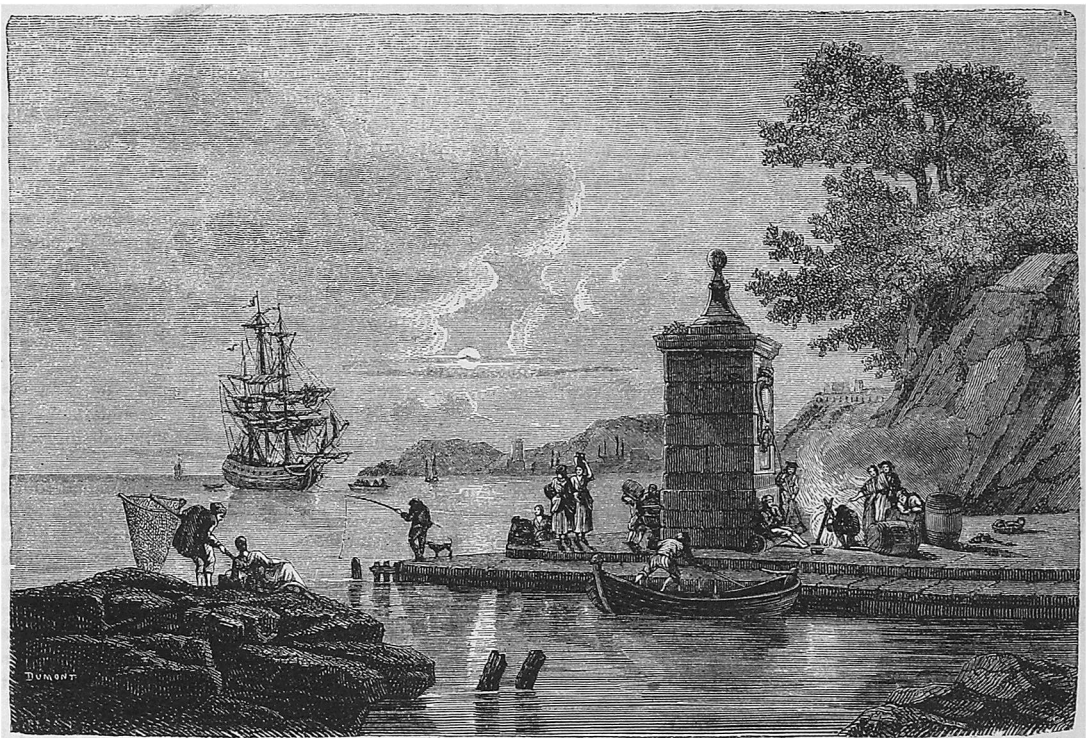
by the tower of Bouc, nearly lost in the distance. This spectacle was a warning to the genius of Vernet; nature,



A VIOLENT STORM.

gratify the eye; on his right, rose a sloping tower of country houses, intersected with trees; on his left, was the little har-

while inviting him to paint marine subjects, furnished him with more than the elements of the picture—she furnished him



VIEW OF THE ENVIRONS OF CITTA NUOVA.

bour of Mastigues; in front, innumerable vessels rocked to and fro in the port of Marseilles, while the horizon was terminated

with the picture itself. We meet, from time to time, with artists who find in themselves, in the treasury of their medi-

tations, in the regions of their idealism, forms and figures that they would in vain seek to produce from memory alone; they know how to represent, with boldness, such as Poussin would have used, not only wonderful phenomena, light, and the visible and palpable objects of creation, but also certain delicate things, the existence of which they have discovered by thought. There are, on the contrary, other artists whose minds are ever ready to receive all outward impressions, which they feel deeply enough to express them with truth and force: their eyes are like windows, through which ideas enter under the form of images, and their genius is like an Æolian harp, which waits, in order to produce a sound, for a breath of air. The former, among whom Joseph Vernet must be placed, belong to the true race of painters. Until he saw a tempest, Joseph Vernet was nothing more than a painter of ships and harbours; but the day when he first listened to the roaring of the furious sea, while on a ship that was being beaten about by the wind, threatened by the lightning, and in danger of going down every instant, his mind was at once on a level with the grandeur of the scene; he recollected for ever the fright and gestures of the sailors, the discomposed features of all on board, and the grand appearance of the swollen billows.

"It was on going from Marseilles to Rome," says one of his friends, Monsieur Pitra, "that Joseph Vernet, on seeing a tempest-gathering, when they were off the island of Sardinia, was seized, not with terror, but with admiration; in the midst of the general alarm, the painter seemed really to relish the peril; his only desire was to face the tempest, and to be, so to say, mixed up in it, in order that, some day or other, he might astonish and frighten others by the terrible effects he would then learn to produce; his only fear was, that he might lose the sight of a spectacle so new to him. He had himself lashed to the main mast, and, while he was there tossed about in every direction, saturated with sea-water, and, excited by this hand-to-hand struggle with his model, he painted the tempest, not on his canvas, but in his memory, which never forgot anything. He saw and remembered all,—clouds, waves, and rocks, lines and colours, with the motion of the boats and the rocking of the ship, and the accidental light which intersected a slate-coloured sky, that served as a ground to the whiteness of the sea-foam."

When he arrived at Rome, in 1732, Joseph Vernet became a pupil of Bernardin Feigioni, a painter of marine pieces, whom, however, he soon surpassed. He was now eighteen years old, having been born in 1714. Entirely unknown in Rome, the young painter lived on what he obtained by the sale of a few marine pieces; he found, however, but few buyers, and obtained but very low prices for a kind of painting, which causes, more than any other, the absence of colour to be regretted; he, therefore, painted marine pieces of smaller dimensions, which he sold for one or two sequins each, until a cardinal, one day, gave him four louis d'or for one. The barber, at whose house he lodged at Rome, let several quarters' rent run on expressly with the intention of being eventually paid with a picture instead of money; and on the day when the painter owed four quarters' rent, the barber, who had often silently contemplated him while painting, asked him for a certain picture which represented day-break, and which had been executed for the cardinal already mentioned. At this juncture, the cardinal arrived, and the barber threw himself at the feet of his eminency, and with tears in his eyes, implored him to let him have the picture which the young artist had just finished.

The reputation of an artist is quickly made at Rome, provided that a cardinal takes the slightest notice of him. It was thus that Vernet's was made: but he thought less of making money by his talent, than of increasing it. Every day he left Rome, to wander about the surrounding country, so that he might study at his leisure the different tones of the sky, as he always wished to paint after nature herself. He watched for the various hues presented by the horizon at different hours of the day, and tried to imitate its fugitive tints; but he soon perceived that his power of observation, great and impassioned though it was, could not keep pace with the con-

tinual variation of the colours of the atmosphere; and he despaired of ever being able to represent on canvas the moving harmony of those pictures, which nature required so little time to execute in such perfection, and which so quickly passed away. He now invented an alphabet of tones, which is so much the more curious, in that another painter has left us a description of it.*

The various characters of this alphabet were joined together and corresponded to an equal number of different tints; if Vernet saw the sun rise silvery and fresh, or set the colour of crimson, or if he saw a storm approaching or disappearing, he opened his tablets, and there set down the gradation of the tones he admired, as quickly as he would write ten or twelve letters on a piece of paper. After having thus noted down, so to say, the beauties of the sky in short-hand, he returned to his studio, to transfer them to canvas, and to render stationary the moving picture he had just been contemplating. Effects, which had long since disappeared, were thus recomposed in all their charming harmony, to delight the eye of every lover of painting.

Far from confining himself within the narrow limits of one branch of his profession, Joseph Vernet determined to take as wide a range as possible. At Rome, he had made the acquaintance of Locatelli, Panini, and Solimene. Like them, he studied the splendid ruins of the architecture of ancient Rome, and the noble landscapes of its environs, together with the water-courses, the rocks, and the celebrated cascades of Tivoli. He also paid particular attention to the proportions and attitudes of his figures, as well as to the picturesque appearance of their costume, which were mostly those of fishermen or lazzaroni. Such love for nature and for art, such assiduous contemplation, at different hours of the day, of the phenomena of light, and such profound study of the numerous accessories whose importance he wished to raise, on being joined to genius of the first order, made an excellent landscape-painter of Vernet; and though he was, undoubtedly, inferior to Claude Lorraine, in producing bold and luminous effects, he was quite equal to him in rendering the effects of vapour, and much superior, as Diderot remarked, in the invention of scenes, in designing figures, and in the variety of his incidents.

The French painter soon occupied a high position in Rome; he was universally sought after, and he now obtained high prices for the same kind of landscapes and marine pieces he had, at first, parted with to discharge his arrears of rent. He received orders from all quarters for *tempests, calms, gales, and cascades*. He was also employed to decorate the Rondanini palace and the Borghese gallery with landscapes, which he executed in the elevated style of Salvator. He chose for his subjects the most terrible phenomena of nature, such as frightful ravines, down which rushed foaming torrents that bounded from rock to rock, and dragged along with them entire trunks of up-rooted trees; but the figures which he painted at the bottom of these abysses are far from being as sombre as the brigands of Salvator; on relieving them of their helmets and hauberts, they would still be the same nonchalant fishermen, whom Vernet knew so well how to place, in a sitting or a recumbent position, on the foreground of his calms. The study he made of Salvator was, however, so far beneficial to him that it strengthened his colouring, gave firmness to his touch, and inspired him with those dark and virile tints by which those of his paintings, which date from his stay in Italy, are easily recognised.

Endowed with wonderful facility for properly understanding everything, and for painting all he undertook well and quickly, Joseph Vernet had identified himself, for a time, with the wild and rough manner of Salvator, and imitated his rigid foliage, his rugged rocks, and the mournful aspect of his ground-plots, cracked and calcined by the sun; but this was not the proper field for the genius of Vernet to work in. He was, above all, a Frenchman, and penetrated

* Renou, in the "Art de Peindre," translated into French verse, from the Latin poem by Dufresnoy. Paris, Didot, 1789.

but with difficulty into those dark regions of the imagination which were not known to French artists before the revolution that has taken place in painting during the present century. In spite of himself, Joseph Vernet always painted places that were inhabited, or at least, inhabitable. Some indication of neighbouring civilisation, a dilapidated villa, or the fragment of an aqueduct, always appeared in the distance, between two mountains that ended in a peak, or on the summit of a rock. For Salvator Rosa alone was the right reserved of painting landscapes, which he had, doubtless, seen nowhere else but in the country of his dreams. Far from having led as adventurous a life as that of Salvator, Joseph Vernet was born for society. Gay, amiable, and witty, he carried with him, wherever he went, the polished and easy manners of a well-bred Frenchman. At Rome, he married Miss Virginia Parker, the daughter of an English catholic, who was an officer in the navy of the pope; and Carle Vernet was the fruit of this marriage.

What, in general, causes artists to be so humane, to conform so rigidly to the manners by which they are surrounded, and to prove so faithful to the thoughts with which they are inspired by the routine of life, is the fact of their painting as much for praise as for the mere pleasure of doing so. While wandering about the *Campagna di Roma*, or going, on board some ship, to visit the gulf of Venice or the shores of Greece, Joseph Vernet still turned his eyes towards France, and longed to obtain the approbation of his countrymen. Each time that an exhibition took place at the Louvre, some marine pieces by Joseph Vernet made their appearance there. He sent two in 1747, and four in 1748. At one time, it was a "Moonlight," in which the moon-beams quivered on a sea covered with boats; and he there showed most felicitously how different ships, while driven by the same wind, follow different courses, according to the manner in which the sails are trimmed. At another time, it was the "Conflagration of a Town" on the sea-coast, in which were admired the effect produced by the flames, their reflection in the water, and the fright and agitation of the people. Joseph Vernet was henceforth pronounced worthy of being ranked with the painter of history, and if envy endeavoured to cry down the works of the absent artist, the *connoisseurs*, who then led the public, the Abbé Leblanc, Cochin, and Diderot, vigorously defended him; and at a later period, glowing epistles of well-turned verse were presented to him. He sometimes took pleasure in coquettishly contrasting a "Tempest" with a "Calm," as if to show that nature never allowed him to be indifferent to anything, and this contrast never failed to produce a good impression. It seemed that marine subjects formed for him a wide field for the depicting of the human passions, a mysterious ground on which he could represent, not only the various movements of the body, but also the different states of the soul: here, repose, nerveless indolence, sleep, or the smiles of vulgar love being seen, while there, were depicted anguish, fright, despair, and death.

How truly dramatic is the effect of "A Tempest" by Vernet! But why are we more touched by this painting than we are by the others? Doubtless, because the most prominent feature in it is man, and because his misfortunes form the real subject of the picture. The artist, therefore, always presents us with a view of the coast, and a tower in which a useless beacon-light is burning, when he wishes to show us the sea covered with drowning persons and with sinking ships, or boats hanging suspended on the top of a wave. The spectator is thus placed on the rock itself against which both ships and waves are dashed.

Those of the Dutch painters who have represented tempests on their canvas, seem to have been inspired by a vague feeling of pantheism. In the storms of Everdingen, of William Van de Velde the younger, of Backhuysen, and of Bonaventura, the sea plays the principal part; it swells as if in obedience to the genius of tempests, and seems irritated with the very sky. Man only appears there as if by accident, to play a very secondary part, and it is at once felt that, strictly speaking, his presence could be dispensed with in the composition of the picture. The tempests of Vernet, on the con-

trary, were composed for the purpose of making the cords of the human passions vibrate within us: the grief of a husband, the cries of a father in despair, the anguish of a young wife cast by the waves upon the shore, are the subjects represented in the marine pieces of Joseph Vernet. He only excites the sea, in order to excite in us terror, or compassion for the sailor in peril. All that ruins the hopes of man, overthrows his castles, swallows up his riches, or tears asunder the affections of his heart, here forms the culminating point of the tragedy in which nature is thrown, like the chorus of the ancients, into the background.

While examining the works of Vernet, at the Cabinet des Estampes, we were, above all, struck by the part played in them by man, which is always made so important a one by French painters. In the "Dangers of the Sea," and in the "Shipwreck," your attention is immediately engrossed by the pathetic scenes there represented. While a mother, bathed in tears, is gazing on her child, stretched dead upon a rock, the crew of the ship are engaged in saving their merchandise; they are strenuously endeavouring to bring numerous casks to shore, and, having harnessed themselves to cables, are dragging towards them the remains of their shattered craft. Some birds of prey are hovering, with outspread wings, over the wreck, waiting to dart down and devour the dead bodies which the receding sea will leave upon the beach.

The figures of Joseph Vernet have certainly nothing of the heroic bearing which Poussin or Gaspar Dughet would have imparted to them; but then, how real are their attitudes, how full of force, how natural! Yet, why do they so rivet our attention? Because there is nothing false about them, because they were studied and sketched at the moment when man, forgetful of himself, assumed such attitudes, or made such gestures as nature then directed. Besides this, the reason that their commonest actions interest us so greatly, is, because they refer to a terrible tragedy, and because, at the end of a rope which the distressed sailors are pulling at with all their might, is seen a mother, who, with her hair dishevelled, is in the act of sinking, or a man about to perish. In the "Impetuous Storm," for instance, there are some figures which, as they kneel on the front rock and bend towards the broken masts, seem to implore, not heaven, but the sea. All the superhuman courage, weakness, and energy that fill the seaman's breast are there vividly depicted by him who, of all the great painters of France, was best acquainted with the seaman's habits.

With respect to the sea itself, Joseph Vernet painted it as it appeared to him on being viewed from a ship or a tower; that is, he only painted its predominating tone and general aspect. I think that the transparency of the waves is exaggerated by the artists of the present day, who represent upon their surface thousands of sparkling pearls which nature has hidden at the bottom of the water. Some make the sea roll golden spangles, like the ancient Pætolus, while others fill it, above all, along the shore, with blue and yellow streaks, or pretty sparkling tints, which make it a sort of liquid jewel-case. Joseph Vernet was more staid, more simple, and more natural. His seas are sombre-coloured, of a dark green, and are characterised by that majestic heaviness which Géricault has so well reminded us of in the "Shipwreck of the Medusa." There are some seas of which the ordinary and predominant colour is a perfect green. Such is the colour of the Mediterranean, above all in the Gulf of Venice. When Vernet was studying in Italy, he imitated this colour in the marine pieces he then painted; they are the best he ever executed, and are easily recognised by their colour alone. By limiting himself to strict unity of tone, the effect of the *ensemble* of Vernet's paintings is more certain and more powerful than it would otherwise have been, because the eye of the spectator is neither attracted by the vagaries of a fringy line of foam, nor occupied in seeking for the treasures which are seen through the limpid waves, and it can, therefore, extend its gaze across the whole of the formidable element, and thus be the better enabled to comprehend its dangers and its fury.

The principles of the art of painting, of those ones at least,

which are applicable to marine subjects, are all explained in the works of Joseph Vernet in the clearest and most magisterial manner possible. If it is required to paint a heavy gale, accidental or double lights, moonlights, waves, or rocks, all necessary directions will be found tersely written in the paintings of Joseph Vernet; we do not, however, mean to say that what he there painted was only executed after long weighing everything in his mind, for nothing is more opposed to inspiration than pedantry; and we can easily believe that all this painter did was done on the moment, taken at once from nature, and dashed upon the canvas with the rapidity of thought, and under the influence of recent observation. Without knowing it, Vernet resolved so well the various problems presented

painted both sun-rise and sun-set. The skies of the Flemish artists were generally overcast, with; here and there, a bluish space. But Vernet, I think, is the only one who, emboldened by the special study he had made of cloudy and stormy weather, ever succeeded in imitating the accidental lights of the sky."

It is also from the same artist that Hermann borrows his examples, when speaking of double lights. There are some landscapes, few in number it is true, in which the daylight and the light of a fire are thrown upon the same objects. The first of these lights ought to be very faint, and then the effect of the second will be extraordinary. Shepherds or travellers seated, near night-fall, on the border of a forest, would form a



THE BATHERS.

by marine subjects, that an entire book has been composed from the observations suggested by his versatile talent, at times beneath himself, but often sublime. His paintings have furnished matter for an excellent little work on landscape painting, published by Hermann, in 1800, at St. Petersburg.

Whenever Vernet wished to represent a gale, he took care not to present the eye with the monotonous spectacle of a number of objects all inclining to the same side. By placing objects that resist the wind by the side of others that yield to it, he gave his scenes a variety of movement which imparted to them an appearance of life. With respect to accidental lights, "it must be observed," says Hermann, "that the greatest painters have seldom introduced them into their pictures. Claude Lorraine never employed them, though he

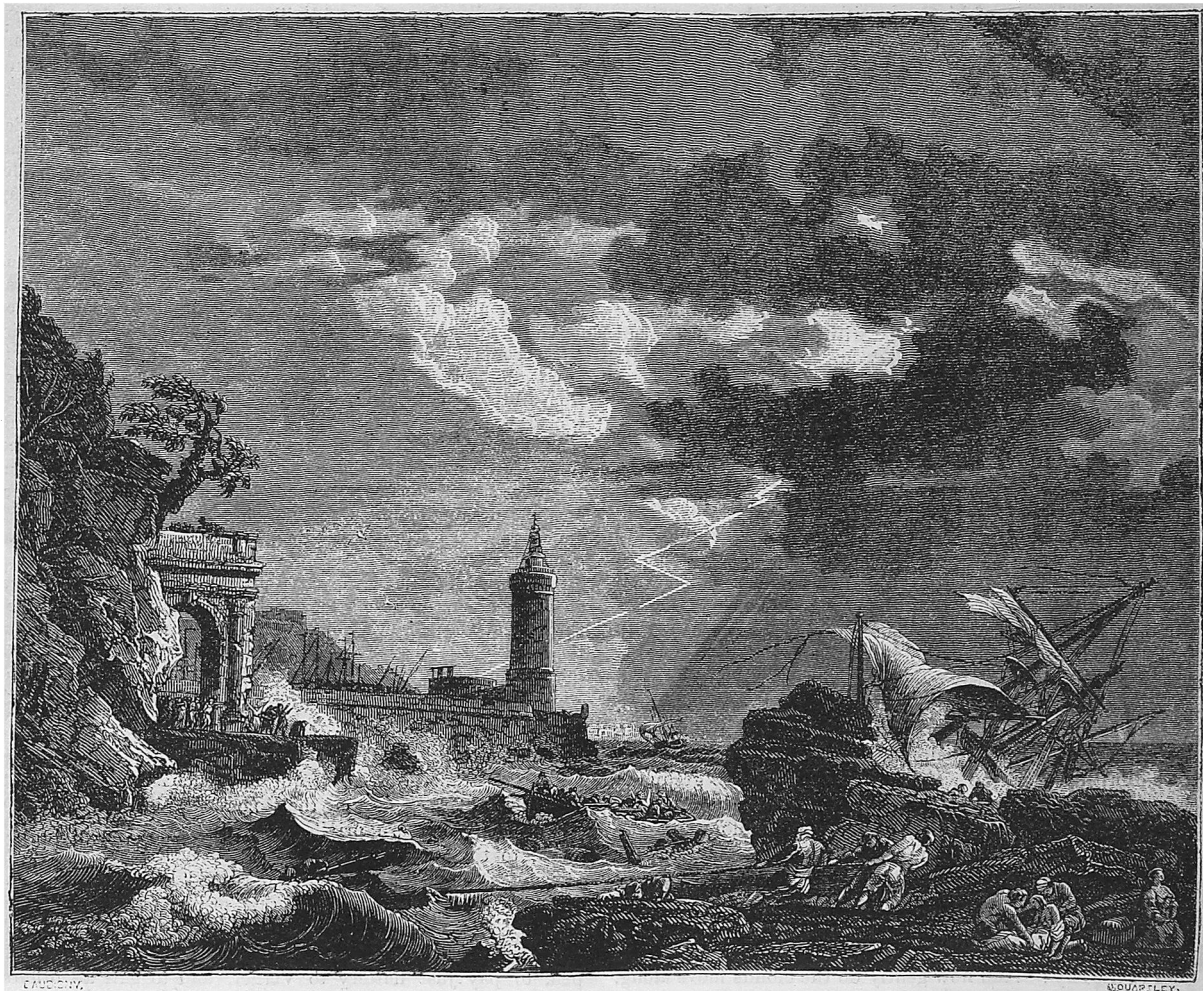
very good subject for a landscape of this kind. Vernet has introduced sailors seated round a fire into several of his moonlights; the fire, however, is too small to clash with the light of the moon. It is, in all cases, necessary for one or other of the lights to have a marked preponderance, for if they were nearly equal, the spectator would be kept in suspense, and the effect would be lost. But it will always be a difficult thing to prevent discordance from arising between the pale, feeble light of the moon, and the strong, red and sombre light of a fire. It is not given to every painter to produce an harmonious effect, under such circumstances, in spite even of so glaring an opposition. "There is," says Diderot, "a point at which the two lights meet, run into one another, and form a peculiar tint, in representing which it is difficult not to be wrong."

With respect to waves and rocks, the French painter has proved that he did not uselessly visit those rugged coasts against which dash the white waves, as they roll upwards towards the sky and seem to foam with fury. His success in this respect, forms one of the chief beauties of his marine pieces, a beauty that neither Backhuysen nor the Van de Velde have introduced into their paintings, since, as they lived or were brought up in Holland, they had no rocks within sight, and could not invent those imposing, fantastic, severe, and picturesque forms of which nature alone furnishes the models, and which the most fertile imagination would never even dream of.

The spirited painter of tempestuous marine pieces was, as we have already said, a man of the most amiable manners. What

that he worked at his calms and moonlights, or, making a truce with the roaring billows of the sea, painted it tranquil and smooth, and represented on the shore nothing but motionless fishermen, sailors seated between the carriages of two cannons, and whiling away the time by relating their travels to one another, or else stretched on the grass in so quiescent a state, that the spectator himself becomes motionless while gazing on them.

Pergolesi died in the arms of Joseph Vernet, who could never after hear the name of his friend pronounced, without being moved to tears. He religiously preserved the scraps of paper, on which he had seen the music of the *Stabat-Mater* dotted down beneath his eyes, and brought them with him to France in 1753, at which period he was sent for by Monsieur



THE TEMPEST.

he most loved, after painting, was music. He had formed an intimate acquaintance with Pergolesi, the musician, who afterwards became so celebrated, and they lived almost continually together. Joseph Vernet had had a harpsichord placed in his studio for the express use of his friend, and while the painter, carried away by his imagination, put the waters of the mighty main into commotion, or suspended persons on the towering waves, the grave composer sought, with the tips of his fingers, for the rudiments of his immortal melodies. It was thus that the melancholy stanzas of that *chef-d'œuvre* of sadness and of sorrow, the *Stabat-Mater*, were composed for a little convent in which one of Pergolesi's sisters resided. It seems to me that while listening to this plaintive music, Vernet must have given a more mellow tint to his painting; and it was, perhaps, while under its influence,

de Marigny, after an absence of twenty years. Vernet's love for music procured Grétry a hearty welcome, when the young composer came to Paris. Vernet discovered his talent, and predicted his success. Some of Grétry's features, his delicate constitution, and, above all, several of his simple and expressive airs, reminded the painter of the immortal man to whom music owes so large a portion of its present importance; for it was Pergolesi who first introduced in Italy the custom of paying such strict attention to the sense of the words and to the choice of the accompaniments.

At a later epoch, Diderot compared his favourite painter to the Jupiter of Lucian, who, "tired of listening to the lamentable cries of mankind, rose from table and exclaimed: 'Let it hail in Thrace!' and the trees were immediately stripped of their leaves, the harvest cut to pieces, and the

thatch of the houses scattered before the wind: then he said: 'Let the plague fall on Asia!' and the doors of the houses were immediately closed, the streets were deserted, and men shunned one another; and again he exclaimed: 'Let a volcano appear here!' and the earth immediately shook, the buildings were thrown down, the animals were terrified, and the inhabitants fled into the surrounding country; and on his crying out: 'Let this place be visited with a dearth!' the old husbandman died of want at his own door. Jupiter calls that governing the world, but he is wrong. Vernet calls it painting pictures, and he is right."

It was with reference to the twenty-five paintings exhibited by Vernet, in 1765, that Diderot penned the foregoing lines, which formed the peroration to an eloquent and lengthy eulogium, such as it but rarely falls to a painter to be the subject of. Among other things, the great critic there says: "There is hardly a single one of his compositions which any painter would have taken not less than two years to execute, however well he might have employed his time. What incredible effects of light do we not behold in them! What magnificent skies! what water! what ordonnance! what prodigious variety in the scenes! Here, we see a child borne off on the shoulders of his father, after having been saved from a watery grave; while there, lies a woman dead upon the beach, with her forlorn and widowed husband weeping at her side. The sea roars, the wind howls, the thunder fills the air with its peals, and the pale and sombre glimmers of the lightning that shoots incessantly through the sky illuminate and hide the scene in turn. It appears as if you heard the sides of the ship crack, so natural does it look with its broken masts and lacerated sails; the persons on deck are stretching their hands towards heaven, while others have thrown themselves into the sea. The latter are swept by the waves against the neighbouring rocks, where their blood mingles with the white foam of the raging billows. Some, too, are floating on the surface of the sea, some are about to sink, and some are endeavouring to reach the shore, against which they will be inevitably dashed to pieces. The same variety of character, action, and expression is also observable among the spectators, some of whom are turning aside with a shudder, some are doing their utmost to assist the drowning persons, while others remain motionless and are merely looking on. A few persons have made a fire beneath a rock, and are endeavouring to revive a woman, who is apparently expiring. But now turn your eyes, reader, towards another picture, and you will there see a calm, with all its charms. The waters, which are tranquil, smooth, and cheerful-looking, insensibly lose their transparency as they extend further from the sight, while their surface gradually assumes a lighter tint, as they roll from the shore to the horizon. The ships are motionless, and the sailors and passengers are whiling away the time in various amusements. If it is morning, what light vapours are seen rising all around! and how they have refreshed and vivified every object they have fallen on! If it is evening, what a golden tint do the tops of the mountains assume! How various, too, are the hues of the sky! And how gently do the clouds move along, as they cast the reflection of their different colours into the sea! Go, reader, into the country, lift your eyes up towards the azure vault of heaven, observe well the phenomena you then see there, and you will think that a large piece of the canvas lighted by the sun himself has been cut out and placed upon the easel of the artist: or form your hand into a tube, so that, by looking through it, you will only be able to see a limited space of the canvas painted by nature, and you will at once fancy that you are gazing on one of Vernet's pictures which has been taken from off his easel and placed in the sky. His nights, too, are as touching as his days are fine; while his ports are as fine as his imaginative pieces are piquant. He is equally wonderful, whether he employs his pencil to depict a subject of every-day life, or he abandons himself completely to his imagination; and he is equally incomprehensible, whether he employs the orb of day or the orb of night, natural or artificial lights, to light his pictures with: he is always bold, harmonious, and staid, like those great

poets whose judgment balances all things so well, that they are never either exaggerated or cold. His fabrics, edifices, costumes, actions, men and animals are all true. When near, he astonishes you, and, at a distance, he astonishes you still more."

Like his sister, Madame de Pompadour, the Marquis de Marigny loved and protected the arts. He was desirous of having all the sea-ports of France painted, and the artist he chose to paint them was Joseph Vernet, who, though he did not inhabit Paris, had never failed to exhibit there his admirable marine-pieces. No one, perhaps, could have been found more fitted than Vernet for this ungrateful task, which, though offering so few resources, required so much knowledge; but it evinced a very slight acquaintance with the genius of Vernet, for any one to give him a sort of didactic order for a series of paintings. Thus imprisoned in an official programme, Joseph Vernet must have felt ill at ease, if, at least, we may be allowed to judge from a letter which he wrote to Monsieur de Marigny, with respect to another order. This curious letter, which is dated May 6th, 1765, runs as follows:—

" I am not accustomed to make sketches for my pictures. My general practice is to compose on the canvas of the picture I am about to execute, and to paint it immediately, while my imagination is still warm with conception; the size, too, of my canvas tells me at once what I have to do, and makes me compose accordingly. I am sure, if I made a sketch beforehand, that I should not only not put in it what might be in the picture, but that I should also throw into it all the fire I possess, and the larger picture would, in consequence, become cold. This would also be making a sort of copy, which it would annoy me to do. Thus, sir, after thoroughly weighing and examining everything, I think it best that I should be left free to act as I like. This is what I require from all those for whom I wish to do my best; and this is also what I beg your friend, towards whom I am desirous of acting conscientiously, to let me do. He can tell me what size he wishes the picture to be, with the general subject of it, such as calm, tempest, sun-rise, sun-set, moonlight, landscape, marine-piece, etc., but nothing more. Experience has taught me that, when I am constrained by the least thing, I always succeed worse than generally."

"If you wish to know the usual prices of my pictures, they are as follows:—For every one four feet wide, and two and a half, or three high, £60; for every one three feet wide, and of a proportionate height, £48; for every one two feet and a half wide, £40; for every one two feet wide, £32; and for every one eighteen inches wide, £24, with larger or smaller ones as required; but it is as well to mention that I succeed much better with the large ones."

When he wrote this letter, Vernet had already begun the "Ports of France." A member of the French Academy of Painting, as he had long been of the Roman Academy of St. Luke, he enjoyed the rare privilege of listening, while he yet lived, to the praises of posterity; for when the public were viewing, at the exhibition, some of those "Ports," to which he often joined shipwrecks, moonlights, or marine pieces by sun-set, he could proudly read in Grimm's correspondence, the vivacious and witty pages which fell from Diderot's too facile pen, to pay just flattery to Vernet, and to gall all others. "Vernet," exclaimed Diderot, "is a great magician; it might be said that he commences by creating a country, that he has men, women, and children in reserve, with whom to people his canvas, as they people a colony, and that he then presents them with what sky, what temperature, what seasons, what happiness, and what misfortunes he likes."

It would be necessary to remain whole hours before the *Ports* of Vernet, in order to fully understand all the labour, all the picturesque and imaginative power, and all the talent he has lavished on them. What is more difficult to paint than a sea-port? If you raise the point of view, you obtain an hydrographical map; and if you lower it, you have nothing but a flat horizon, inelegant lines, and an immense sky to fill. The effect of these pictures, which are naturally cold, was greatly increased by Vernet's talent for drawing figures; he grouped them in great numbers under light skies, sometimes grey and silvery, sometimes scorching hot, but always cloudy; and he varied the pose, the action, and the attitude of the

figures in a thousand ways. Some are selling fish, mending nets, carrying coffee, and rolling barrels, while others are walking and talking in the sun. Here, some girls of Marseilles are stopping to listen to the gallant conversation of a dandy abbé; while at Bordeaux, some men are loading a cannon to return the salute of a frigate; here, a magazine is in course of construction, or a tartan is being calked; there, men are piling up cannon-balls, or the soldiers of the watch are bringing along a quarrelsome sailor; while in another place, men engaged in fishing for tunny, impart an unexpected and lively appearance to the "View of the Gulf of Bandol." Thus filled with animation, the "Ports" of France met with great success when they appeared; and this success was increased when Louis XV., after speaking of them in terms of the highest praise, remarked with shameless nonchalance, that "the only ships in France now, are those in Vernet's pictures."

On returning to his landscapes and marine pieces, Vernet again found all the fire of his genius. His famous "Tempest," engraved in so admirable and learned a manner by Balechou, spread his reputation through Europe. The Czarina wished for some of his pictures to decorate her private gallery of the Hermitage, into which the sensual Empress allowed nothing but paintings and love to enter. And when the prince of the Asturias was preparing for himself a mysterious retreat, beneath the shades of a valley in the environs of the Escorial, he wished to have the panels of his rooms painted by Vernet, and sent him the dimensions of them to enable him to execute them. The Marquis of Lansdowne purchased a "Shipwreck" by Vernet, which sold at the sale of his lordship's pictures for 145 guineas. But the most charming productions of Vernet were to be found in France, in the possession of Diderot and of Madame Geoffrin, and in the celebrated cabinet of the Duc de Choiseul. The "Women Bathing," which was sold at the sale of the Duc de Choiseul's pictures for £238, is a delicious painting, far superior to the sweetest productions of Poelemburg. Some rocks which are kept upright by leaning against each other, have formed a natural grotto, which affords the women a retreat full of mystery and coolness. On seeing these voluptuous creatures who, as they think they are unperceived, fearlessly abandon themselves to the caresses of the rippling waves, one would at first imagine it was Calypso surrounded in her grotto by her nymphs; but the female attendant, with a basket of wine and fruit, reminds you that it is a Calypso of every-day life, that her nymphs have come from the neighbouring town, and that they will soon be troubled, not by the arrival of Telemachus and Mentor, but by the deriding remarks of some young urchins from Marseilles who are perceived at a distance in some boats and on the shore.

Of the innumerable pictures executed by Vernet, the Louvre alone possesses twenty-seven, among which, the fifteen that form the collection of the "Ports of France" occupy a prominent place. There is one in the National Gallery, and another in the gallery at Dulwich, while numerous others are to be found in many of the public and private collections of Europe. More than fifty engravers have been employed, at different times, to reproduce with their burin the works of this great painter, which are said to amount in all to two hundred landscapes and marine pieces.

Vernet himself has also left a few small etchings, executed in a neat and spirited style; among them are the following:—"A Landscape, with a Bridge and Part of a Village;" "A Shepherd and a Shepherdess;" "A View of a Market-place;" "A Canal, with Fishermen."

Vernet's figures may be blamed for one defect, and that is, their being generally lighted by a special light, narrow enough to allow of the model of the breast, the shoulders, and the naked legs being brought prominently out. It appears as if the general light of the picture was not sufficient for him, and that he kept in reserve a particular ray for the purpose of bringing out the figures of the ground; but the eye of the spectator, entirely taken up by the shipwreck, does not remark these *ruses* and imperfections, which, however, lend a great degree of piquancy to the work, and cause the figures to stand prominently forth, in a manner admirably in keeping with the place they occupy

in the talent of the painter and the sympathies of the beholder. Sometimes, too, the never-varying costume of his fishermen is out of place; this is the case, for instance, when he represents the shores of Greece, and different views in the East, on which occasions Chardin's "Manon" and Greuzes' "Loinette" are met, side by side, in the same scenes as the Sultana of the "Arabian Nights" and Louthembourg's "Armenian."

No one, we think, ever surpassed Vernet in the art of composition. At first sight, the spectator would be inclined to assert that, viewing by mere chance, vessels, towers, old trees, and rocks, Vernet painted them in the same confusion in which they were presented to his gaze; but, if we analyse the composition, it is easy to see that the lines are perfectly balanced, that the groups answer to one another, that the masses are skilfully calculated, and that, in the midst of apparent disorder, the painter has assigned to each different object the most favourable position as regards the satisfaction of the spectator's eye and the general plan of the picture. How happy he is in the composition of his marine pieces! See, for instance, in the "Tempest," immortalised by Balechou's graver, how well the strange-looking rocks on the left harmonise with the simple lines and the bold forms of the Roman buildings that extend into the sea itself! Is it not pleasing to behold the graceful acanthus in all its mild, soft elegance, springing up between the fantastic rocks and the angry-waves? How great, too, is the effect invariably produced by the old trees, with their knotty, twisted, and shaken trunks, and which are placed in the positions they occupy, simply to show the violence of the wind! These trees have no leaves, save at the extremity of some of the branches, whither the sap still mounts, while their other limbs have been carried away by the force of the storm, or hang down from the trunk, almost snapped off and dead.

A curious anecdote is told of Balechou in connection with one of Vernet's pictures, called "The Storm," and which the former had engraved. This engraving was much admired for the fluidity of the water, and the spirit of the figures. One hundred of the prints were consigned to an engraver in London, and part of them sold; but some persons having objected to the very clumsy manner in which a long dedication, inscribed under the print, was written, Balechou said he would soon remedy that, and with his graver drew a number of black lines over the dedication, on the copper, so as, in some degree, to obliterate the words, and then sent a hundred impressions to England. All connoisseurs, however, soon found these to be "the second impression," and eagerly bought up the first; but no man of taste would look at a print with the lines. This mortified the English printseller, who wrote to the French engraver, and complained that he could not sell the second set for half price. "Morbieu!" cried the Frenchman, "how whimsical these English *virtuosi* are! yet, they must be satisfied." He, therefore, set to work with his punch and hammer, and, having repaired the letters, sent out the print with the inscription, apparently in its first state. A few of these were sold; but the imposition was soon discovered by the faintness of the impressions; and then those who did not possess the first impressions, were glad to have the plate in the second, rather than the third state; so that nearly all the third set lay upon the hands of the printseller. This produced a complaint; and the complaisant Frenchman, ever eager to satisfy his English customers, again punched out the lines, and brought the inscription to its second state.

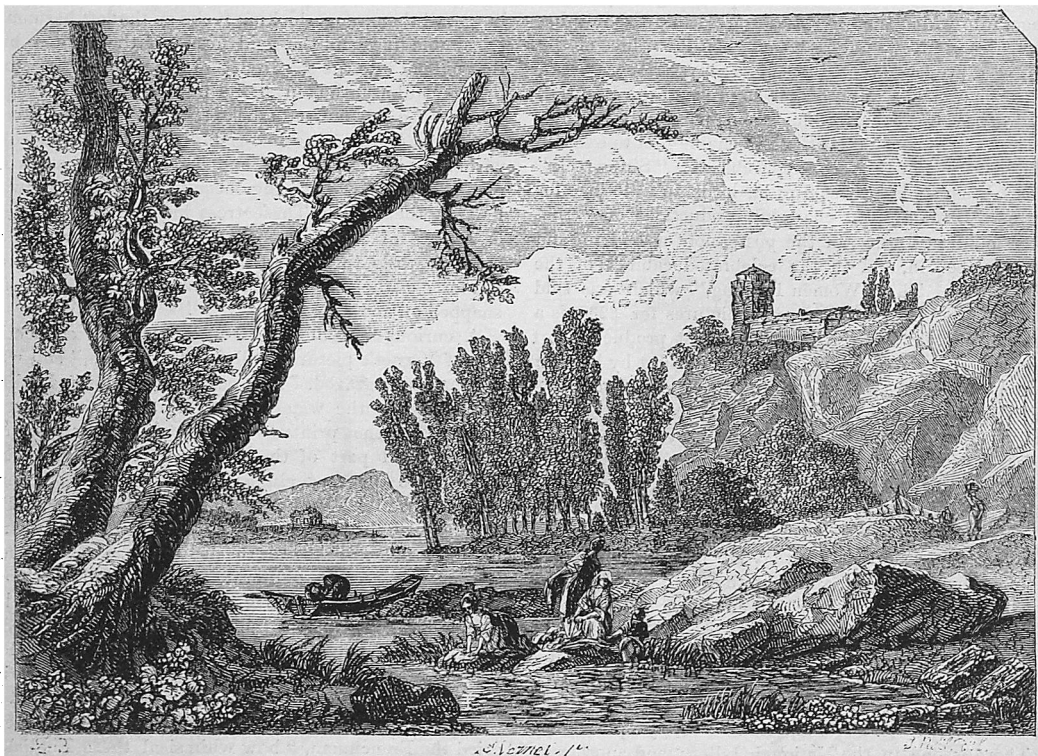
Vernet has sometimes been reproached with certain inaccuracies in the disposition of his rigging. Even during his lifetime, the Abbé Leblanc, one of his great admirers, affecting, perhaps, a more profound knowledge of nautical matters than that which he really possessed, exposed some errors of this kind in the pictures which Joseph Vernet had just sent to the exhibition of 1748. "Words would not suffice us," says this keen critic, "if we endeavoured to bestow on the marine pieces of Monsieur Vernet all the praise which they deserve; of the four he exhibited, and which are all nearly

equally fine, two in particular, the second of which represents a *moonlight*, in which the sea is covered with fishermen's boats, and which is rendered with great truth, have more especially attracted attention by their singular effects. Monsieur Vernet here shows in a very clear manner how different vessels may pursue different courses under the same wind; a circumstance which the spectator is enabled to comprehend very easily by noting how the sails are trimmed. However, there is one of the barks which he has not represented sufficiently inclined; I allude to that one, which, in nautical phrase, is *hugging the wind*, and which does not *heel over* enough. However well a vessel may behave under sail, she is always more deeply immersed on the side to leeward than on the other." When persons speak of matters so important as the movements of a ship, it is doubtless allowable for them to avail themselves of all the knowledge they possess, and even to be severe in their judgment. But, although it may be true that our great marine painter laid himself sometimes open to

such satisfaction in painting, to the great detriment of the general effect of the whole mass.

Joseph Vernet died on the 3rd of December, 1789, at the Louvre, where the king had assigned him apartments.

Towards the end of his long and active life, which he had ever spent in a manner that did honour to himself and country, he began to fear that his well-earned pension would be stopped by the troubles arising in France; and as 75 years of age is rather too late a period for a man to take a very active part in national disputes, he meditated a retreat to England, which was, however, put a stop to by his death. Vernet left behind him two disciples, Lacroix and Volère, but the true inheritors of his talent were in his own family. That Diderot, who was a contemporary of Vernet, should have allowed himself to share in the inordinate enthusiasm then universal for the marine pieces of this great painter is easily comprehensible, especially when the writer is one so apt to become intoxicated with his own writings, and who criticises



ITALIAN WORKWOMEN.

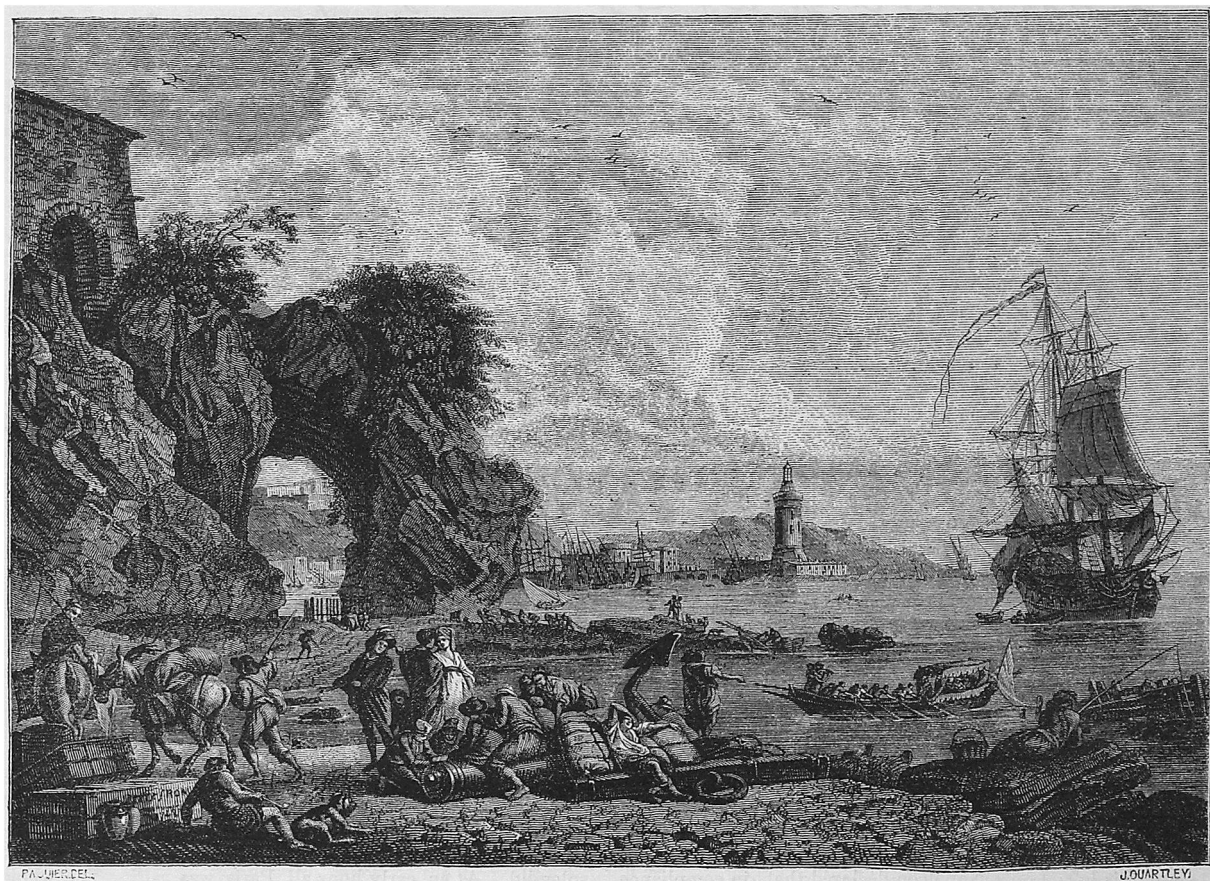
criticisms of this description, it is certain that, by pushing this spirit of observation too far, the critic will become ridiculously minute. The end of the real painter is not this scrupulous exactness in the rig of a vessel. His object is to paint the terrible deep; and who, when contemplating a fine representation of a tempest, would ever think of the pulleys and gaskets? If Vernet now and then forgot some trifling details of the rigging, it was because his great wish before any other, was not to sacrifice any of the boldness of his composition. In painting, truth in small things sometimes injures the effect of the great ones. The naval draughtsman, who draws the plans for a vessel about to be constructed on the stocks, is, doubtless, obliged to observe the necessary accuracy even in the smallest details, but the same obligation is not binding on the artist, whose object is to move the human passions. Vernet's eye seized the general features with sufficient accuracy for a sailor, who can perceive things at a glance, to see what manœuvre the painter wished to depict, but he did not stop to count the nails, pegs, and other objects which artists of small talent have

under the influence of passion, and makes reason subservient to poetry. But the feeling of admiration for Joseph Vernet which took such a hold on the eighteenth century, and which was expressed on every occasion by the great men of those times, from Voltaire to Laharpe, has come down to, and been sustained in, our own age. In spite of the excessive variation that public opinion has undergone with regard to painting, the School of David, which had a horror of every one who had ever held a pencil under Louis XV., and which included in its contempt even the inimitable Chardin—the School of David, we repeat, made an exception in favour of Vernet. Taillasson has written some eloquent pages, when speaking of this great artist. "He represented," says Taillasson, "better than any other painter the beautiful form of the clouds, those immense, light, dazzling, or dark bodies, those floating mountains, raised, overthrown, and dispersed by the wind. No one expresses as he does the raging of the fearful storm, by a sublime distribution of light and shade. Who, I ask, has lent, like him, beauty,

grace, energy, and, so to speak, expression to the waves of the deep? If others have drawn all the ropes of a vessel, he alone has endowed them with soul—their dismantled rigging, their shattered masts, their torn sails, and their melancholy fragments, are full of the most powerful interest. What painter of this style of picture has displayed in his works scenes of such truth and pathos? At one time, painting the freshness and the mild light of morning, he represents the sun starting from the bosom of the motionless sea, while at another he paints it descending into the waves, surrounded by gold and fire, and seeming at one and the same time to kindle into flames the earth, the heavens, and the sea! Sometimes, again, he shows it almost invisible beneath a thick fog, which lends nature a new sort of interest by scarcely allowing her to be perceived. Fires in the middle of the night—those ravishing, painful, and horrible sights, especially in a sea-port—have been rendered

thus that Vernet was appreciated long after his decease, for at the period when Taillasson wrote these lines, a great revolution had taken place in painting as well as in politics. At the present day, all great foreign nations still place Vernet in the first rank. He himself, however, pronounced judgment on himself. The sentence deserves being preserved, for it is great. Comparing himself to the great painters, his rivals, he says: "If you asked me whether I painted skies better than such and such an artist, I should answer 'no!' or figures better than any one else, I should also say 'no!' or trees and landscapes better than others, still should I answer 'no!' or fogs, water, and vapours better than others, my answer would ever be the same; but though *inferior to each of them in one branch of the art, I surpass them in all the others.*"

In speaking of Joseph Vernet, Chalmers says: "His works will live as long as those of any artist of his day. In a



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by him with frightful truth. Oftentimes he depicts the moon shining upon the placid scene below; and the watch-fires, lighted by the sailors, form a striking contrast to her silvery rays. It is delightful to see them playing on the sombre immensity of the waves; the spectator feels a pleasure in discovering, in the distance, ambitious mortals in frail vessels, traversing the universe in the midst of the silence of the night. Although these pictures of tempests must be ranked as his most sublime efforts, he has also painted some admirable views of the sea becalmed, at different hours of the day. Sometimes these views represent an arm of the sea, whose azure waves are cradled, all sparkling, in the midst of a delicious landscape; sometimes they portray the tranquil sea, ploughed by vessels urged forward by a light breeze; or else some peaceful shore, on which happy fishermen, in the midst of their easy labour, seem to be singing the praises of love and liberty." It was

light and airy management of his landscape, in a deep and tender diminution of his perspective, in the clear transparent hue of the sky, liquid appearance of the water, and the buoyant air of the vessels which he depicted, he had few superiors. In small figures employed in dragging off a boat, rigging a ship, or carrying goods from the quay to a warehouse, or any other employment which required action, he displayed most uncommon knowledge, and gave them with such spirit (though sometimes a little in the French fluttered style), as has never been equalled by any man except our most excellent Mortimer; and to be the inferior to Mortimer in that line is no dishonour. It has been the lot of every painter who ever lived, and will probably be the lot of all who ever will live. He carried that branch of the art to its highest degree of perfection. As a proof what estimation he was held in, it may be mentioned that two of his pictures were

purchased by Madame du Barry for two thousand pounds sterling. It was said of him, that his genius knew neither infancy nor old age.

Joseph Vernet has signed his etchings *Joseph Vernet, Fecit*; and almost all his paintings in the manner indicated by the

fac simile to the right. To the left, we reproduce his signature, as it appears on the books of the academy of which he was a member; and the note, of which a *fac simile* is given below, is borrowed from the curious book entitled "*Isographie des Hommes célèbres*."

Vernet

J. Vernet &

Monsieur

Il ya bien eings a fix semaines que j'en travaille plus dans l'attente que vous ayez été la bonté de me l'envoyer. J'y avois laissé deux tableaux que j'eussent de faire pour M^{re} l'abbé Terray. étant trop frais pour être transportés ailleurs, ce que les ay fait aller depuis plus de quinze jours.

a Paris le 30. L^{re} 1774.

Votre très humble et
très obéissant serviteur
Vernet

EUGENIE, EMPRESS OF THE FRENCH.

On Saturday, January 22, were assembled at the Tuileries—the scene of many an eventful deed,—the senate, the *corps législatif*, and the members of the council of state, to receive a message from the emperor's lips. Standing before the throne, supported by Prince Jerome on the right, and Prince Napoleon on his left, Louis Napoleon declared that, in compliance with the wish manifested by the country, he had come to announce his marriage—a marriage not in alliance with the traditions of ancient policy, and therefore advantageous to France. "Why should he marry a foreign princess?" he observed; "it ought not to be forgotten that for seventy years foreign princesses have not mounted the throne but to behold their races dispossessed and proscribed by war or revolution." In a bold and manly way he stated that, "When in presence of old Europe, one is borne on by the force of a new principle to the height of ancient dynasties, it is not by giving an ancient character to one's escutcheon, and by seeking to introduce oneself at all costs into a family, that one is accepted. It is rather by ever remembering one's origin, by preserving one's own character, and by adopting frankly, in presence of Europe, the position of a *parvenu*." Immediately the speech was printed and placarded through France. This was the first official notification that the emperor had fallen in love, and was courageously resolved to marry, not for state convenience, but for private affection; of course no opposition was made. The imperial will was law.

A week passed, and the marriage had become a fact. The following Saturday the civil contract took place at the Tuileries. On Sunday the marriage received the sanction of the church in the venerable pile of Notre Dame; the ceremony was, as all such ceremonies are the other side the water, splendid. At an early hour all Paris was astir. The whole neighbourhood of the palace and the various streets through which the procession was to pass, presented one dense mass of human life, amongst which the liveliest curiosity was exhibited by the crowds for a sight of the empress, of whose beauty rumour had said so much. Inside the church the *tout ensemble* is described as gorgeous in the extreme. The foreign ambassadors and ministers and all the public functionaries of distinction were placed in seats assigned them. Then the dazzling attire of the ladies, with the gorgeous official costumes of French and foreign officers, gave to the scene an unwonted brilliancy. The Archbishop of Paris, having received their majesties, proceeded at once to the ceremony of the marriage, which was conducted, in all respects, according to the solemnities of the Roman Catholic Church, and accompanied by all the pomp of imperial prestige and royal tradition. A canopy of silver brocade was held over their majesties' heads by two bishops; the choir repeated, several times, the *Domine Salvum*; the archbishop presented holy water, and chanted the *Te Deum*, which was repeated with thrilling effect by the orchestra and choir. At the conclusion